

# Kim Smith: Why some parents can't afford to take parental leave

[1]

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online [2]

## EXCERPTS

When I was six months pregnant, I was offered a fantastic opportunity reporting for Global Calgary. The problem was that it was a one-year contract, meaning if I took a full year of maternity leave, I'd be off for most of the job.

After deliberating with family and friends, I decided to take the job and move to Calgary. It was one of the best decisions I've made in my career, but also one of the most difficult.

I lived in Calgary five days a week and drove home to Edmonton on weekends to see my husband. After three hours behind the wheel, my feet would swell up so much that my shoes wouldn't fit.

My last day of work was on a Sunday and my son was born five days later (on his due date).

I spent three wonderful months at home with our baby before my husband took the remainder of the parental leave. Our family of three, plus our cat, all moved to Calgary so I could finish my contract.

At Global Calgary, I worked on some of the most rewarding stories of my career. But with a baby who still woke up to feed throughout the night, I was exhausted.

I continued to breastfeed, which meant pumping milk in my boss's office (which, to this day, I don't believe he knew about), in the basement shower, and in the back of Global News vehicles.

On one occasion, I went out of town to cover a breaking news story about a plane crash. We drove for multiple hours through snowy rural Alberta to find the crash site. I didn't have my pump with me and by the time we returned to the station, it was well past midnight. I remember complaining to my male colleague that my breasts were uncomfortable.

As difficult as it was working full-time with a baby at home, I don't regret going back early. My husband did an amazing job at home and he had an extended bonding time with our son.

Recently, I posted a story about the tens of thousands of Canadian parents opting for the 18-month parenting leave.

The story was one of our most popular for Family Matters and was shared widely across the country. I did radio hits on the topic for a number of Corus stations.

As wonderful as the extended leave sounds, it's not an option for many Canadians. Some parents can't afford to take the extended leave, others are contract workers or self-employed.

According to a 2017 study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy, about a third of couples don't qualify for parental leave benefits.

I'm lucky that I had a healthy pregnancy, an easy baby and a supportive husband, which made my story possible. I know many other moms aren't so fortunate.

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